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GOD in CHRIST, a Wall of Fire round
about the Church, and the Glory in the
midst of her.

BEING A

S E R M O N,

Preached at Milnathort before the Associate Presbytery
of Kirkcaldie ; January 8. 1774.

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ZEPH. iii. 16, 17.

*In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not : And to Zion, Let not
thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ;
he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy : He will rest in his
love, he will joy over thee with singing.*

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ZECH. ii. 5.

For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

THE Prophet Zechariah, prophesied at the same time with Haggai. They both began their public ministrations much about eighteen years after the return of the Church from her captivity in Babylon; when the building of Jerusalem and the Temple, was both greatly retarded by its enemies, and neglected by its friends.

The main scope of the Prophet in this prophecy, is to excite and forward the Jews to the building up of Jerusalem; and, being encouraged by gracious visions and revelations, respecting the success and prosperity of the work: He animated the hearts, and strengthened the hands of the builders, by laying before them the same grounds of consolation, whereby he was comforted: And, under the good hand of God, the work was carried forward, and that, over the belly of all opposition made thereto, from whatever quarter it did arise.

In the preceding chapter, the Prophet has two special and comforting visions: The one, of a man among the myrtle-trees, which were in the bottom, that is, of Christ in his despised Church. The other, of four horns, (by which we are to understand the enemies of the Church); and of as many carpenters, by whom these horns were to be cut off.

In this chapter, he has another pleasant discovery. He sees a man with a measuring line in his hand, whereby he is given to know, that Jerusalem should be built; and the Temple reared up. And, as the opposition made to the work was to be managed both with open violence, and a load of the most contemptuous reproach. In the words of the text, the Lord engages himself by promise, to defend them from both these kinds of persecution: From open violence, by being a wall of fire about

about Jerusalem; and from reproach, by being the glory in the midst of her. For "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." Glorious things indeed, are here spoken of the city of our God: And were faith in exercise, with what pleasure and delight, would we both speak and hear of them? This promise, is a most enriching, and comforting legacy left to the Church; the believing improvement of which, will not fail to afford her the sweetest consolation in the very worst of times.

In the words we may observe, 1. The Author of the promise pointed out in the pronoun *I*. *I*, saith the Lord; *I*, who am Jerusalem's God in covenant, her Saviour and Redeemer; the Mighty One of Jacob her King. *I*, who am both able and ready, to do all for her, which her condition at any time, can possibly call for at my hand.

2. We may observe the object of the promise, *Jerusalem*, that is the Church of God, the spiritual Jerusalem, called Mount Zion, and the city of the living God, Heb. xii. 22. For, though the promise speaks primarily and immediately concerning the safety and glory of the earthly Jerusalem, in which did dwell the worldly sanctuary: It is intended, ultimately and chiefly, to set forth the safety and glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, or the gospel Church; as is abundantly obvious from the scope and design of this whole prophecy.

3. We may observe the promise itself, consisting of two branches.

The *first* setting forth, that preservation which the Lord vouchsafes to his Church and people, from that kind of persecution which is often carried on against them with open violence and rage. "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about Jerusalem:" As if the Lord had said, tho' at present in a very defenceless state, and as yet without a material wall; she need not be afraid, for I will be unto her a wall, and that of the most impregnable nature; a wall of fire. A wall in which there shall not be the smallest breach. It shall be round about her: So that from whatsoever quarter the enemy may attempt to assault her, he shall not prevail against her.

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In this branch of the promise, there may be an allusion to the custom of travellers in the eastern countries, who, when they pitched their tents, kindled fires round about them, to deter lions, or other wild beasts, from falling upon them, or disturbing their repose. Or to that astonishingly glorious symbol of the divine presence, the pillar of cloud and fire, which accompanied Israel from Egypt into the promised land: And by which; they were not only led and directed in their several journies, but also protected from the fury of their raging adversaries. To this the Prophet Isaiah evidently refers, in a promise most similar to this, chap. iv. 5. "And the Lord will
 " create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and
 " upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and
 " the shining of a flaming fire, by night: For upon all
 " the glory shall be a defence."

The *second* branch of the promise, presents us with the Church's defence from the scourge of the tongue; "And will be the glory in the midst of her." God has taken up his rest in spiritual Jerusalem, he is known in her palaces for a refuge; and from thence, he shines forth as her glory. He is often said to be in the midst of the Church, Isa. xii. 6. and to walk in the midst of the Church, Rev. i. 13. And when he saith, *I will be the glory in the midst of her*, respect may be had to the position of the Ark in the congregation of Israel, while they journeyed unto the typical rest. It was situate in the midst of the congregation; and being eminently typical of our Lord Jesus Christ, is therefore called the glory of Israel, 1 Sam. iv. 21.

4. *Lastly*, We may observe the certainty of the promise, as to its accomplishment. "I, saith the Lord, will
 " be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the
 " glory in the midst of her." The Lord hath said it, and therefore, let Jerusalem believe it for her comfort; and her enemies to their confusion. God hath spoken in his holiness, let us take pleasure in it; and firmly trust his faithful word: For he is not a man, that he should lie: Nor the son of man, that he should repent.

DOCT.

Doctr. It is sufficient matter and ground of comfort to the Church in the very worst of times, that a God in Christ, has engaged himself by promise, to be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her. "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

The doctrine being evident from the text, in discoursing from it, through grace, I shall endeavour to observe the following method.

I. I would mention some things implied in the promise contained in the text.

II. Speak of the Lord as a wall of fire round about his Church and people.

III. Enquire in what respects he may be said to be the glory in the midst of the Church.

IV. Offer some reasons, why the Lord has engaged himself by promise, to be a wall of fire round about the Church, and the glory in the midst of her.

V. Apply.

The first thing, is to mention some things implied in the promise. And,

1st, The promise implies that the Church hath many enemies. That she needs a wall, a wall round about her; and such a wall as the text informs us of, plainly demonstrates, that she has her enemies round about her also. The Church is often set upon by persecution and open violence; she is frequently infested with hereticks and false teachers, 2 Pet. ii. 1. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall bring in privily damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." Zion is oft in danger, even from the sons she has brought up. Hence, the Apostle Paul tells the elders of the Church of Ephesus, that even of their own selves, men should arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, Acts xx. 30. And as we have heard from the Holy Ghost, speaking in his word; so have we seen it, in the city of
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our God. There have been from the beginning, and to the end there will be, some to oppose the purity of gospel doctrine in the Church; some to oppose her government and discipline, and others to endeavour to cast the veil of superstition and will-worship over the purity and simplicity of her divinely instituted acts of worship and homage. The Church and people of God, are an eye-sore to Satan and a prophane world; and therefore they are continually plotting mischief against them. Hence is that exhortation, 1 Pet. v. 8. "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." Our Lord warns his disciples, and in them all his followers, to the end, that what they have to expect from the world, is tribulation, John xiii. 33. *In the world ye shall have tribulation.*

2. The promise implies, that the Church in herself considered, is no equal match for her enemies. She, comparatively considered, is but a small city, and her inhabitants few and weak. The Church is but a little flock. The sheep of Christ's pasture are but as a few lambs in the midst of many ravening wolves. The Church and people of God have found cause, in all ages, to adopt the language of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 12. "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us;" and, to join with the Psalmist, speaking in the name of the Church, Psal. cxxiv. 2, 3, 4. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul."

3. The promise-implies, that however weak the Church is, in herself considered, she has a sufficiency of strength in her glorious Head, to overmatch the power and policy of her most potent and subtile adversaries, "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." The Lord of Hosts is ever upon her side, and the God of Jacob is her refuge, Psal. xlv. 7. However many and strong her enemies be, her King passes on before her, and Jehovah is on her head; and all her enemies must be found liars,
Micah

Micah ii. 13. "The breaker is come up before them :
 " They have broken up, and have passed through the
 " gate, and are gone out by it ; their King shall pass be-
 " fore them, and the Lord on the head of them," Deut.
 xxxiii. 29. " Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto
 " thee, O people saved by the Lord ; the shield of thy
 " help, and who is the sword of thy excellency ! and thine
 " enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt
 " tread upon their high places."

4. The promise implies admirable condescension in God, he condescends to our similitudes, and so to adapt himself to our weak capacities, as to set himself in every light that may tend most for the comfort of his people in the day of trial. Are they at any time exposed to open violence ? Then, he tells them, *He will be a wall of fire round about them.* Are they at any time exposed to reproach ? And, (tho' the excellent ones of the earth) counted as the off-scouring of all things ? Then, he assures them, *he will be the glory in the midst of them.* However low therefore, they may at any time be brought by their enemies ; they have always cause to triumph in him, saying with the Prophet in name of the Church, " Rejoice not against me, O mine enemies : When I fall, " I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be " a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the " Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead " my cause, and execute judgment for me : He will bring " me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteous- " ness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and " shame shall cover her who said unto me, Where is the " Lord thy God ? Mine eyes shall behold her : Now " shall she be troden down as the mire of the streets."

5. The promise implies, that the safety, beauty, and glory of the Church stand and fall together. In the case of any particular Church, the Lord is no longer a wall of fire round about her, than he is the glory in the midst of her. When any Church lets go her glory ; the glory of purity in her doctrine ; the glory of a faithful and impartial exercise of the sword of discipline ; the glorious order and government her Head has appointed in her ;
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with the purity and spirituality of her worship: However happy she may look on herself to be, from some external considerations, such as the favour and protection of the potentates of the earth; yet her defence is in reality departed from her. We see in the case of God's professing people of old, when once the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the Cherub, whereupon it was, to the threshold of the house; they soon found themselves deprived of their safe-guard and defence, Ezek. ix. 1,—5. How far the glory in the above respects, is departed from the Churches of Britain and Ireland, and in a particular manner from the Church of Scotland, is no less visible than lamentable, to every spiritual observer. And it is no less to be lamented, that zeal for the declarative glory of God, and a concern for the maintenance of purity, in doctrine, discipline, worship, and government, is greatly upon the decline, even among those who have been led out to espouse a testimony for the same. Iniquity is abounding, and, alas! our love is waxing cold. We may, with too much propriety, adopt the Apostle's complaint, Phil. ii. 21. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

6. The promise implies, that as the Church and people of God, have in reality nothing to fear in the way of their walking with God, and worthy of him: So, he would not have them to give way to despondency; whatever opposition they may meet with from hell and earth in the way of duty. There were many to oppose the building of Jerusalem, and the instruments to be employed in the work, but comparatively few in number, and their strength small: Yet, the Lord would have them take courage, and not be afraid; seeing, he would be a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in the midst of them. And to the same purpose is that promise, Isa. xliii. 2. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

7. *Lastly*, The promise implies, that the believing consideration of what the Lord has from the beginning done for the Church, and what he has promised he will continue to do to, and for her, unto the end, is more than sufficient to support her under the forest pressures and calamities, she may at any time be trusted with. When the Church in general, or the particular believer begins to give way to desponding fears, it is not on account of the number and strength of the enemy, but the want of faith in a promising God. It was not the number and strength of the inhabitants of Canaan, that made the men Moses sent to spy the land, despair of getting the victory over them; Num. xiii. 25. But their want of faith in the promise; Psal. cv. 11. "Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance."

II. The *second* head in the method, was to speak of the Lord as a wall of fire about his Church and people. Where,

First, We may take a view of the wall itself. *Secondly*, Of the nature and quality of it, as set forth in the text, *a wall of fire*.

Then, as to the wall, It is God himself. "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about." As "the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth," Psal. cxxv. 2. All the perfections and attributes of the divine nature, as displayed and manifested in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, harmoniously conspire in making up this wall. His omnipresence, his omniscience, wisdom, power, immutability, mercy, love, and faithfulness. And to these, we may add, the hedge of his special providence, which, Satan, the head of all that opposition which is at any time made against the Church, found to be a wall of fire, through which, he was by no means able to penetrate; hence saith he, "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, (to wit, Job,) and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased."

2d, As to the nature of this wall, we are told, that it is of fire. And we think, the expression is intended.

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1st, To set furth the terrible Majesty, in which the Lord is sometimes pleased to appear in behalf of his Church and People, and against their enemies. A wall of fire must be very terrible; and with God is terrible majesty. Accordingly, we find, that when he was executing his awful, though just judgments upon the Canaanites, he is said to have gone before his People as flaming fire; Deut. ix. 3. "Understand therefore, this day," saith Moses to Israel, "that the Lord thy God is he that goeth over before thee, as a consuming fire." The Lord is sometimes pleased to answer the prayers of his oppressed heritage, in the way of inflicting most affecting judgments upon their enemies, Psal. lxxv. 5. 2 Chron. xxxii. 20, 21. And the tremendous appearance our Lord Jesus is to make to all his enemies at the last day, we are told, is to be in flaming fire; 2 Thes. i. 7. 8. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. The manner of expression intimates, that the protection the Lord vouchsafes to grant to his Church and people, is sometimes no less manifest and visible, than terrible and affecting to their enemies. Many visible proofs and evidences, has the Lord condescended to give of his regard for his Church, and of his displeasure with his and her enemies. So observable were his judgments upon Egypt, that even the ministers of Satan, behoved to acknowledge, that the finger of God was in them; Exod. viii. 19. "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God." And so manifest was the Lord's hand in the deliverance of the Church from her thralldom and bondage in Babylon, That she did not only see it herself, but even the heathen were obliged to acknowledge his might, Psal. cxxvi. 2. "Then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them." Most signal have the appearances been which the Lord has been pleased to make in behalf of his Church in these lands; particularly, at our Reformation from popery, and at the memorable Revolution, when he cut the cords of an ungodly crew, when using all their power and

and policy to wreath the yoke of Popery again about our necks. And we have reason to acknowledge to his praise, that, since that time, he has been pleased, once and again to blast the designs of the emissaries of the man of sin, when intending to deprive us of our most precious liberties, both civil and religious.

3. The expression intimates, that God is an active defence to his people. A wall of fire, must not only defend and bear off an enemy; but it must exceedingly offend and distress those against whom it flames. Though God is often pleased, for wise and holy ends and purposes, to bear long with his, and his peoples enemies; yet, when his patience and long-suffering is abused by them, instead of their being thereby led to repentance, he will whet his glittering sword, and his hand will take hold of judgment, and then shall he render a recompence to his enemies; yea, "the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them, Psal. xxi. 9." Sentence not being always speedily executed against an evil work, the worker is ready to conclude, That God is like himself, and that he approves of his sin, Psal. l. 21. But let poor deluded adversaries to God, and his Church and people, consider, that if they finally persist in their enmity to the Lord, and his hidden ones; their violent dealing will inevitably fall upon their own guilty heads; Psal. lxxviii. 21. "God shall wound the head of his enemies; and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

4. When the Lord saith, he will be unto the Church a wall of fire round about; as much is intimated, as that he is an impregnable defence unto her. There is no breaking in upon a wall of fire. It is true indeed, the Lord is sometimes pleased, for wise and holy purposes, to suffer his Church in general, and the believer in particular, to be brought very low by their enemies, before he interpose for their deliverance. This has most frequently been the case, and will continue to be the case with the Church while in her militant state: But such dispensations of providence, have been, and still shall be so over-ruled and managed by infinite wisdom, love, and grace, as that they tend in the event to promote and advance her real good
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and spiritual welfare : For he abideth faithful, who hath said, " Upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the " gates of hell shall not prevail against her," Matth. xvi. 18. And, says the Apostle, Rom. viii. 28. " We know that " all things work together for good to them who love " God, to them who are the called according to his pur- " pose."

5. *Lastly*, The manner of expression intimates, that all who fight against mount Zion, they rush upon devouring fire. All the enemies of God and his Church, are but as briers and thorns before the fiery flame ; through which her God can most easily break, and burn them up together ; Isa. xxvii. 4. " Who would set the briers and thorns " against me in battle ? I would go through them, I " would burn them up together." And of God's faithful witnesses, we are told, that fire proceedeth out of their mouth, whereby their enemies are devoured ; Rev. xi. 5. " And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of " their mouth, and devoureth their adversaries : And if " any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be " killed."

III. The *third* head in the method, was to enquire in what respects the Lord may be said to be the glory in the midst of the Church. And,

1. It has been the privilege of the Church, to have her God in the midst of her, in respect of his presence with her in human nature. Her God in the person of the Son, was pleased to become a partaker of flesh and blood ; and for a season, was pleased to sojourn with her upon the earth ; John i. 14. " The Word was made flesh, and " dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as " of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and " truth." In this respect he called himself the light and glory of the world, in a most singular manner ; John ix. 5. " As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the " world." But, as it was not expedient he should continue with the Church on earth, in respect of bodily presence, after he had glorified God here, and finished the work given him to do : His presence with the Church in this

this respect, is no more to be expected : The heavens having long since received him, and that until the restitution of all things.

2. He is the glory in the midst of the Church, in respect of his real gracious and spiritual presence. Hence saith he to his disciples, a little before his departure from them, as to his bodily presence ; " Yet a little while, and " the world seeth me no more ; but ye see me : Because " I live, ye shall live also," John. xiv. 19. At his ascension, the last words, it is probable, which the disciples heard him express, contained that most gracious and comforting promise, we have ; Math. xxviii. 19, 20. That he would be present with his Church, in and by his spirit, until the mystery of God shall be finished. And after his reception into glory, the beloved disciple had, in vision, a most comfortable view of him as " in the midst of the Church, Rev. i. 13. And I saw, " In the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, clothed " with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the " paps with a golden girdle." Yea, the very name of the gospel Jerusalem, is, *The LORD is there* ; Ezek. xlviii. 35. " It was round about eighteen thousand measures : " And the name of the city from that day shall be, *THE " LORD IS THERE.*"

3. He is the glory in the midst of the Church in respect of his ordinances, which are the symbols of his presence. There is a real beauty and glory in divine ordinances ; and that, both in themselves considered, and in the eye of all spiritual discerners ; however mean and contemptible they may appear in the sight of a carnal world. They are all marked with the beautifying stamp of his authority, and in and by them, he is pleased to manifest the glory of his power, love, grace, and wisdom. His people see his power and glory in his holy place ; Psal. lxiii. 2. The ordinances of God, have in them more glory and beauty to the believing soul, than tongue can fully express. Hence they are disposed to cry out with wonder, " How amiable " are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts !" Psal. lxxxiv. 1. And with what esteem and regard, do we find the spouse speaking of divine ordinances ? Cant. i. 16. " Our bed is " green

"green; (says she) the beams of our house are cedar,
"and our rafters of fir."

4. He is the glory in the midst of the Church in respect of faithful gospel Ministers, who are his gift to the Church; Eph. iv. 11, 12. Faithful ministers, are the ambassadors of the Prince of Peace; Eph. iv. 20. Hence saith the Apostle, 2 Cor. v. 20. "Now we are ambassadors
"for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we
"pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." And as they are the ambassadors of Christ, he may be said in respect of them, to be representatively present with the Church, in and by their ministry. Hence they are called the glory of Christ, 2 Cor. viii. 13. And they are so, only in so far as he is pleased to manifest his glory in and by them, unto the Church.

5. *Lastly*, He is the glory in the midst of the Church, in regard, that all the beauty and glory of the Church, is from him, and all centers in him. All that glorious grace any of the sons of men are made partakers of, is from him. True Church-members, are glorious within; and their cloathing is of wrought gold, Psal. xlv. 13. But all this beauty and glory, in which the saints do shine in the kingdom of grace here, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament in the kingdom of glory, is only through his comeliness put upon them: And the glory of all they are, and of all that, by his grace, they are made to enjoy, will forever center in him, in their harmoniously united expressions of eternal praise and thanksgiving in the Jerusalem above: According to the Apostle's earnest wish, Eph. iii. 21. "Unto him be glory in the Church
"by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without
"end. Amen."

IV. The *fourth* head in the method, was to enquire, wherefore the Lord has engaged himself by promise, to be a wall of fire about the church, and the glory in the midst of her? And *1st*, This must be resolved in sovereignty. All the promises, and this among the rest, take their rise from free, rich, and sovereign love and grace; and not from any good qualifications, real or supposed, in the objects they respect: Hence the promises are said to be
given

given us in a testamentary way; 2 Pet. i. 4. And the Lord gives the prophet Ezekiel commandment, to say unto the house of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake." Chap. xxxvi. 22.

2. He has done so, because of his great love to the Church: He loved her from everlasting; Jer. xxxi. 3. When the fulness of the time was come, he gave himself for her, in the person of his Son; Eph. v. 2. 1 John iii. 16. He purchased her with his own blood; Acts, xx. 28. And such is his love to her, that she is as a seal upon his very heart; Cant. viii. 6. And her walls are continually before him; Isa. xlix. 16. Yea, so dear are his people unto him, that whosoever toucheth them to their hurt; they touch the apple of his eye; Zech. ii. 8. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye."

3. He has promised to be a wall of fire about the Church, and the glory in the midst of her, because of her natural weakness. The Church is weak in herself considered, and she has many enemies to contend with. Many and great are the trials which the Lord in holy providence, sees meet to permit his Church and people to fall under; and for their encouragement amidst them all, and lest they should sink and faint under them, he has given them most gracious assurances, that he will not fail to be their help in the day of trouble: But will most effectually succour and support them against every assault of their adversaries, whether from without, or from within. The Church may now know in her experience, "That her enemies have often come in upon her like a flood;" and she may be assured, they will continue to do so; but, for her comfort, she has the faithful promise of him, with whom it is impossible to lie; "That the spirit of the Lord shall lift up the standard against them," Isa. lix. 19. And therefore, she may adopt the words of the Psalmist, even in troublous times; Psal. xxxii. 7. "Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah."

4. The

4. The Church is his dwelling-place, the tabernacle of the most High, the house wherein he hath chosen to rest; Psal. cxxxii. 13. "The Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: Here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Jerusalem is the city of the mighty King, Psal. xlviii. 2. and therefore he will establish her for ever, Psal. lxxxvii. 5. she is the house of his glory, and therefore, the house that he will glorify with his presence.

5. The safety, well-fare, and prosperity of the Church, tends to the advancement and manifestation of the declarative glory of God in the world; and therefore he will be her safe-guard, and her glory. His wisdom, power, love, and faithfulness, are illustriously displayed in his care of, and conduct about the Church; Psal. cii. 16: "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory."

6. *Lastly*, The Church is his own, his treasure, his peculiar treasure; his bride and spouse. True Church-members, are his dear children, the travel of his soul, Isa. liii. 11. Now, every one naturally cares for his own. The loving husband will not see the wife of his bosom suffer wrong, while it is in his power to afford her help: Nor the affectionate father the children he dearly loves: And are we once to suppose, that the Father of mercies, in whom compassions flow, will not vindicate and defend those from all real hurt and injury, upon whom he has fixed his everlasting love?

V. The *fifth* thing in the method, was to make some improvement of the subject. And,

The first use may be of information.

1. From what has been said, we may see, that the Church of God is a strong city, and cannot be removed; but must abide for ever. Her God is her wall of defence, and that round about: And in the midst of her, he is, and ever will be the glory. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth ever for ever," Psal. cxxv. 2. With what sweet delictation, may all the genuine children of Zion sing that song! Isa. xxvi. 1. "We have a strong

"city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Seeing God hath made Jerusalem's walls salvation, her citizens should make her gates praise.

2. We may see, whence it is, that the Church is said to be beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners. Why, her God is a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her. This sufficiently accounts, not only for her beauty, but also for the terror and amazement, into which her most potent adversaries have been sometimes cast, upon the very sight of her; Psal. xlviii. 4, 5, 6. "For lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hastened away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail."

3. We may see, that the Church is not only a strong city, and terrible to her enemies; but she is likewise a city compactly built together. She hath her wall round about her. "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together," Psal. cxxii. 3. The whole city is joined and compacted together with her wall of fire. All the true citizens, are, by a real and vital union, joined to him, who is the glory in the midst of them. And, being unite unto him, and consequently to one another in him, they have all communion with him, and with one another in him, suitable to the nature of that union. He is round about the city, not only as a wall of defence, but also as a wall of conjunction. He is the head, Col. ii. 19. "From which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministred, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

4. We may see, that the Church is a very honourable society. She is a society, separated from, and exalted above the world. She dwells alone, incircled with her wall of fire; and is not reckoned among the nations. As her God is unto her a wall of conjunction, he is likewise her wall of separation from the world lying in wickedness. And, as it is the indispensable duty of her spiritual guides, so to keep up the hedge of her discipline, as to the utmost of their power, they may separate between the precious and the vile: That this is so little the con-

cern of many who go under the character of ministers in our day, is one of the many sins and provocations for which a holy God may justly visit us in a way of righteous judgment. Our Lord Jesus, as for other ends and purposes, has appointed the seals of the New Covenant, to be a badge of distinction between such as visibly bear his image, and those, who by unsoundness in the faith, and immorality in practice, visibly declare themselves to be Satan's slaves and vassals: But, alas! how little regard is paid to this design of their institution, by many who count themselves stewards of the grace of God?

5. We may see, that every attempt to raze Zion to the foundation, is not only beyond expression wicked, but also most vain and foolish, and must, in the issue, prove abortive. The kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers may take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed: But he who sitteth in heaven, shall laugh, and he who is the glory in the midst of the Church, shall hold them in derision, Psal. ii. 2, 3, 4. The word is gone out of his mouth, with whom it is impossible to lie, That no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper; and that every tongue that shall rise against her in judgment, she shall condemn, Isa. liv. 17.

6. We may see, that the Church and people of God, have no reason to envy the men of the world of their glory; what they look upon to be their glory. They consider the riches, honours, profits and pleasures of a vain world, to be their glory. The sons of Laban, called their cattle their glory, Gen. xxxi. 1. But the Church has her God for her glory. The Almighty is her gold, and she hath plenty of silver. "I will be the glory in the midst of her saith the Lord." And to the same effect is that promise we have, Isa. lx. 19. "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." The glory of the Church and people of God shall continue with them, when all earthly pomp and splendor, shall be put under an everlasting vail.

7. We may see, how much we should make it our study and endeavour, to hold fast by a God in Christ, constraining him by the prayer of faith to abide with us. His presence

presence with us, is both our safety and our glory. How careful should we be, in our several stations, as ministers and people, not only to receive, but also to observe and keep pure and intire, all such religious worship and ordinances, as he hath appointed in his word? It is in the way of our teaching; teaching our people carefully to observe all things whatsoever he hath appointed and commanded us, (though not for our so doing) that we can expect him to be round about us as our defence; as in the midst of us, as our glory.

8. We may see, how little such as would desire to be faithful to Christ, and seek the good of spiritual Jerusalem, in a backsliding day, need to regard the reproach and contempt that is poured upon them by an apostatizing generation. When reproached for lifting up a testimony for the covenanted principles of the Church of Scotland, and endeavouring in our places and stations, to prosecute the ends thereof, in opposition to the awful spear of apostasy both in principle and practice, which is prevailing in our day: Let us, instead of being ashamed on that account, rather join with such as have shared the same lot before us; in rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, Acts v. 41. He is with such, as through grace, endeavour to act faithfully for him, and that both as their defence and glory. And wherein is the reproach of the world to be accounted of?

9. Is the Lord the glory in the midst of the Church? Then his Church and people should glory in him. This is the indispensable duty of all the children of Zion, Psal. cxlix. 2. "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Let them rejoice and be very glad, in what he is, in and to Jerusalem. In what he has done for her already, and in what he is telling us he will still continue to do for her; while he saith, "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her."

10. *Lastly*, We may see matter of comfort to such as are cast down on account of the low state of matters in the Church at this day. It is true, indeed, there are many ready to say, that matters are very comfortable at present

present, with respect to the Church : Say they, the Church enjoys the countenance of the civil magistrate ; we have external peace, and we enjoy freedom of sentiment ; and there are no outward lets or impediments laid in the way of the progress and advancement of religion. But however desirable these things may be in themselves, matters are nevertheless low in the Church in our day. Purity in doctrine is greatly on the decline in this land, and has been so now for a long time past : The heritage of the Lord is oppressed by violent intrusions, whereby the pulpits in Scotland are daily filled with a time-serving ministry, who, in a great measure, content themselves with the fleece, without evidencing much regard for the flock. The sword of discipline is seldom drawn, except it be against such as offer any mite of testimony against the prevailing apostasy of the age. And a scheme is of late set up amongst us under the specious and plausible pretext of Catholic Love, for uniting Erastians, Independents, &c. with Presbyterians, in ministerial and christian communion ; whereby an unthinking generation is tempted to believe, either, that the glorious Head of the Church has appointed no certain form of government to be observed therein ; or else, that it is not worth the contending for. And though the Lord, in his adorable providence, has, in his kindness to the generation, brought a testimony to the field, against the present course of backsliding from attained-unto reformation ; it is to be lamented, that said testimony, in place of having the desired effect, is, by the bulk of the generation, either treated as the object of their rage, scorn and contempt ; or else, in a careless and indifferent manner, totally neglected ; while few, comparatively considered, are disposed to take part with it, and endeavour, through grace, to prosecute the ends of it.

But however low matters are with us, and though the night should yet be darker ; yet, none who desire to favour the dust of Zion, need despair of a reviving time ; but let them look to the promise in the text, and the many like words, the Lord has put upon record for the comfort of the mourners in Zion. And let them remember, he is faithful who hath promised ; let them plead the promise

wise in faith, and wait for an answer in the Lord's own time; for he will arise and have mercy upon Zion yet, and the time to favour her shall come, the time that he hath set. And when he appears in his glory to build up Zion, he will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer, Psal. cii. 17.

The last use of the doctrine, may be in a few exhortations. And,

1. Let us who are called to act in the capacity of Ministers of the Gospel, be exhorted to bless the Lord for all the kindness he has shewed to his Church and people heretofore; that he has hitherto been a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her. Let us bless his holy name, for all the glorious things, and good and comfortable words he has spoken concerning Zion, respecting the time to come; and particularly for this promise; that he will ever be "a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her."

Let us be concerned to walk about Zion, and go round about her, telling her towers, marking her bulwarks, and and considering her palaces: That we may tell the children of Zion for their comfort, and those who are yet aliens to the common-wealth of Israel, for their encouragement to cast in their lot with them: That this God is our God for ever and ever; and that he will be our guide even unto death, Psal. xlviii. 12, 13, 14.

Let us be exhorted, not to fall under unbelieving discouragements about the Lord's work in the Church; however low it is at present; or however much lower it may yet come to be. Tho' there are but few appearing to embrace a testimony for the purity of doctrine, the just and impartial exercise of discipline, and for presbyterial Church-government, in opposition to Erastianism on the one hand, and Independency upon the other, with the latitudinarian tenets, which are propagated amongst us: However this may afford us matter of lamentation, it is no just cause, why we should give way to unbelieving discouragements. For it is not by might, nor by power of human kind, that the Lord ordinarily carries on his work; but by his spirit: And how few, and weaksoever the instruments are, he is pleased

pleased to make use of in his work, they are sufficient in his hand to carry it forward: Let us then study daily to comfort ourselves, and one another with these words, and that amidst all that is discouraging. "I, faith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

2. Let me exhort you who are the people of God, the true and genuine children of spiritual Jerusalem, planted in the house of our God, not merely in respect of external privilege, but by his grace.

Let me exhort you,

1. To bless the Lord for bringing you (who were by nature aliens to the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise) to be fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of faith. Great is the reason you have to bless the Lord on this account: For now, God is your God, your glory, and the uplifter of your heads. You are in a state of safety, let the worst come to the worst. No real evil can possibly befall you, nor plague come near your dwelling. God, as your God in covenant, is, and for ever will be, a wall of fire round about you; and he will also be your glory.

2. Give all diligence to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, studying in all things to please God, approving yourselves unto him in all things; and leaving it for your unfeigned desire to be approved of by him. Let your light so shine before those among whom you live, in a holy life, and savoury conversation, as that they, beholding your works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven; and that strangers to Christ may be excited and stirred up by your example, to come into the same happy condition with yourselves.

3. We exhort you, not to be ashamed of our Lord Jesus, of his truths, words, and ways, before a perverse generation. But, remember, that the closest attachment to all his truths, ordinances, and institutions, is your honour and crown. Be concerned always to bear in mind, that whatever you may at any time suffer for cleaving to Christ with purpose of heart, you have this for your encouragement under it, That he hath said to Jerusalem and
all

all her genuine children, That he will be unto them a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of them.

Lastly, As to you who are only inhabitants of spiritual Jerusalem in name and profession, but not in reality. We exhort you to consider, that a name to live among men, will not avail you in the day of trial, and particularly in the day of death, if you continue dead in trespasses and sins. However long you may hide your hypocrisy under the veil of a plausible profession, yet, remember, the day is hastening on, when *the sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness will surprise the hypocrite.* Be exhorted, then, to unite with the Lord Jesus by faith, and you shall henceforth, be in a safe and most honourable and happy condition, having a three-one God in Christ, a wall of fire round about you, and being possessed of him, as your everlasting glory. "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."



THE END.